

PART B: SHELTERS

Women's Shelters

Family Shelters

Appendix C: Sector Responses

PART B: SHELTERS Women's Shelters

Women's Shelters

A shelter provides short-term emergency housing for abused women and their children in a safe and secure environment. (Male children over the age of 14 years will be referred to an alternative shelter). Although shelters are well known as providing safety and housing for women and their children, shelter workers also provide other equally important functions including advocacy and support to women and their children. All the services are completely confidential, are accessed on a voluntary basis, and are provided at no cost.

The confidentiality of the women accessing shelter services is paramount to shelters. To that end, most shelters maintain only minimal records on the women, and these data are for the purposes of statistical information.

Responding to non-English speaking women and their children coming from abusive relationships is of the utmost importance to shelters. Shelters, when provided with the resources, provide non-English women and their children with an objective interpreter for all aspects of the shelter's work.

Shelter workers incorporate a feminist perspective into their work and provide a number of services to abused women and their children. These services are designed to:

- provide a safe, supportive, and accepting environment;
- educate women about the power and control dynamics characteristic of an abusive relationship;
- ensure the shelter is safe and secure with specialized security systems particular to each shelter;
- provide crisis intervention and supportive counselling. Crisis intervention may occur over the telephone and/or initially when the woman and her children arrive at the shelter. Over the course of her stay, the woman and her children receive supportive counselling;
- provide appropriate supportive counselling on an individual or group basis for the children from abusive environments;
- increase community awareness on the issues of abused women with an emphasis on holding the abuser responsible for the violence, as opposed to re-victimizing the woman;
- collaborate with community members with the common goal to work towards the elimination of abuse against women and children;

Appendix C: Sector Responses

PART B: SHELTERS Women's Shelters

- support and educate other professionals on the particular issues, dynamics, and myths of abuse in relationships;
- provide support, information, and advocacy for abused women who come into contact with the criminal justice system;
- provide community outreach for abused women not residing in the shelter, including individual and group support;
- be accessible to every woman regardless of race, faith, or spiritual beliefs, languages, cultures, ages, economic situations, geographic locations, abilities (physical, emotional, or developmental), or sexual orientation;
- lobby on an ongoing basis for services to meet the needs of abused women and their children;
- provide 24-hour crisis telephone support and 24-hour on-site support staff;
- provide emergency transportation for abused women and their children;
- devise a safety plan to meet the individual needs of the abused woman and her children;
- refer abused women who may require additional services to the appropriate agencies (i.e. addiction, counselling, etc.).

General Information about Women's Shelters

A common misconception about women's shelters is that they provide housing for women who have only been physically abused. Shelters, however, provide support to all abused women including those who have been emotionally, psychologically, financially, verbally, and/or sexually abused. Women are not required to provide physical indicators of their abuse.

Women seeking shelter service may call directly, or outside support workers may call on their behalf. If an advocate is calling on the abused woman's behalf, it is common practice for shelter workers to ask to speak directly to the abused woman to obtain and to provide necessary firsthand information (e.g. to highlight possible safety concerns, to help her feel connected to the shelter, and to ease her transition to the shelter). The telephone numbers of shelters are located on the front pages of the telephone book.

A woman may seek safety at a shelter as many times as needed. There are no restrictions to the number of times a woman may seek safety at a shelter.

Co-operative living guidelines are in place in shelters. Their living conditions typically include having women care for their own children, and share the responsibility of household chores such as cooking and cleaning.

Appendix C: Sector Responses

PART B: SHELTERS Women's Shelters

Family Shelters

In addition to women's shelters, there are also family shelters where women may seek temporary residence with their children. Family shelters provide housing to any family grouping, and are not restricted to homeless women and children. The services are voluntary, confidential, and free to those who qualify for social assistance. If the woman has an income, the funding is based on what she is able to pay.

There is one primary distinction between women's shelters and family shelters. Family shelters do not provide a secure environment for an abused woman the way a woman's shelter does. Family shelters accept referrals from women's shelters for women who do not require a secure environment. Additionally, family shelter workers refer residents to other services, including counselling agencies, employment centres, and housing resource centres, as appropriate to a particular case. A community housing support worker is also on site.

Linking with other services

At the woman's request, shelter workers will work co-operatively with other services on her behalf. Given the often-short lengths of stay at the shelter, it is crucial that other agencies continue to provide services to abused women even after the women have left the shelter. Shelter workers do not serve as the woman's primary case manager.